

**Factors influencing classroom participation: A case study of  
Bhutanese higher secondary student.**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Students are encouraged to actively participate in classroom. Nevertheless, many of them were still reluctant to speak up. This paper discussed the factors which influenced classroom participation in Bhutanese context. Both interviews and observation were used to collect data from the field. Interview was conducted with 20 students from class XI comprising 10 males and 10 females. The goal was to identify the forms and level of participation, and subsequently to select the students in terms of active or passive participation in the classroom. Observation was done for a period of 5 weeks of teaching in three classes in class XI. Their forms of participation were recorded throughout the teaching hours. The findings showed that majority of Bhutanese students were involved in passive participation: sitting quietly, writing notes, listening and paying attention. Interestingly, a good number of students was also actively involved in asking questions, giving opinion, responding opinion, discussion, making comment and seeking help. The interview data showed that the factors influencing classroom participation were teachers, friends, classroom size, advance preparation and language. Classroom participation also entailed positive benefits in teaching-learning process. However, the findings would serve as guide or insight for teachers and learners regarding the factors affecting students' participation among school students. This also assist teachers and learners to take into the accounts the way to overcome students' problems such as a fear of participation in the classroom and thus increase motivation.*

**Key words:** *Participation, benefits, influencing factors, forms of participation and learning environment.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Classroom participation is a very important factor in yielding positive learning outcomes for students and further developing their abilities. Participation means students speaking in the class which consists of asking questions, making comments and joining in group activities [1]. Students who do not participate in aforementioned activities are considered as passive [2]. Participation is considered as paying attention, being on task, responding to questions, and participation in group discussion, asking questions, showing respect, seeking help and making good use of class time. However, in general, classroom participation requires students to interact in the classrooms to indicate that they are learning and paying attention.

"Involvement matters," as [5] points out, and this involvement can occur both inside and outside the classroom. Active involvement in class facilitates critical thinking [6] and the retention of information that might otherwise be lost [7]. [8] stated that:

The more they participate, the less memorization they do, and the more they engage in higher levels of thinking, including interpretation, analysis, and synthesis [9].

Students who participate also show improvement in their communication skills [10,11], group interactions [12] and functioning in a democratic society [13].

Thus, participation allows students to build on their knowledge, demonstrate they have understood the curriculum, develop confidence, and apply theory.

Furthermore, [3] stated that participating in classroom activities provides a critical opportunity for learning new skills. Class participation helps students to make deep and meaning connection in mind that are very important for learning. Low grade in examination and incomplete home work are an early sign of problem with class participation [2]. [4] also stated that when students rise voices in the classroom, they practice and develop a range of advance thinking skills.

Numerous factors influence student participation both directly and indirectly including student traits, classroom structure, and the role of teacher, classroom climate, and confidence. It is paramount that educational institutions and educators focus on determining what factors will positively affect levels of student participation within the classroom. This ensures that all students receive equal opportunity in developing their communication and demonstrating their knowledge as they progress through their education. Participation will not only help students progress in their education but more importantly in their careers by demonstrating that they can develop arguments, communicate thought, and interact in discussions with their colleagues [14].

However, in the Bhutanese context, literature on this topic is very limited. Therefore, the purpose of this descriptive study is to examine which factors in the classroom learning environment affect student participation.

## **2. PURPOSE OF STUDY**

Active learning is a part of learning process where the classroom participation is encouraged and students are motivated. All teachers and parents do want their students to involve in active learning scenario because not only is it more interactive, it helps students to overcome shyness, introvert issues, getting friendlier with classmates. However, there are particular students, who, in spite of being intelligent, tend to shy away from this interactive process. It is the duty of teachers and responsibility of parent to nurture their kids to be groomed in better environment. It requires a little extra effort from respective stakeholders. Hence, this study aims to find out the factors that affect classroom participation in Bhutanese context. Authors would like to bring encouraging and discouraging factors to the notice of teachers.

## **3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY.**

The findings would serve as guide or insight for teachers and learners regarding the factors affecting students' participation among school students. This also assist teachers and learners to take into the accounts the way to overcome students' problems such as a fear of participation in the classroom and thus increase motivation. Usually students attempt to avoid class participation to protect one's own self-image by not taking the risk of making mistakes, fear of being laughed at by peers and are negatively evaluated by teachers. Thus, it is important for teachers to create conducive environment to enhance participation in the class.

## **4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

What are the factors that influence student's participation in the classroom?

Sub questions:

1. What are the factors which promotes classroom participation?
2. What are the factors which discourage classroom participation?
3. What are the benefits of classroom participation?
4. What are different forms of participation in Bhutanese classroom?

## **5. METHODOLOGY**

### **5.1. Study Area**

A case study was conducted in Chhukha Central School under Chhukha district, Bhutan. Total students in the school were 650 consisting 300 girls and 350 boys in 2017. The level of education starts from class nine to twelve. School uses English and Dzongkha (Bhutan's national language) as the medium of communication. The education structure in Bhutan is categorized as primary (Pre-primary to VI), Lower Secondary (VII -VIII), Middle Secondary (IX-X), Higher Secondary (XI-XII) and Tertiary Education (Bachelor or Diploma degree). In middle secondary grade, student study subjects viz. English, Dzongkha, Maths, Geography, History, Economics or ICT and Science. In Higher secondary grade, there are three primary streams viz. Science, Commerce and Arts and humanity.

### **5.2. Participants**

In this study, students of three biology classes (Section A, B & C) were selected for observation where IX "A" has 38 students, XI 'B' 41 students and XI C' 37 students. The convenience samples involved 116 students, 53 females and 63 males. An interview was conducted with only 20 (passive and active) students which were randomly picked from three different classes comprising 10 males and 10 females for a better understanding of factors affecting students' participation in Bhutanese context. The age group of students ranges from 17 to 21.

This study was conducted during the teaching practice as a fulfillment of assessment in research module at Samtse College of Education under Royal University of Bhutan. I have selected three biology classes for the study as being their subject teacher. The selection was done based on the convenience of the author due to the time constrains. He was assigned by the college on teaching practice for a period of 45 days. So, as per the requirement of the college, he has substituted three classes of the prevailing biology teacher and in turn, he was appointed as my mentor for five teaching weeks. Besides, he assisted me as research assistant (RA) to observed classes throughout the study.

### **5.2. Preliminary survey**

Before an author intervene the field, he has observed his mentor's classes to familiarize teaching scenario in real classroom and also to record various forms of participation in the Bhutanese classroom. Based on the observation, observation table and interview questions were framed with his Research assistant (RA).

### **5.3. Data collection**

In-depth interviews were used as a strategy of inquiry for this research study [31]. This allowed the author to gather detail answers, first-hand, from the participants and also allowed flexibility in probing for more detail information. The focus of the study was on how students view participation within the classroom environment.

In semi-structured interview the author (interviewer) had provided interviewees with questions in advance so that they could think, reflect them and be more relaxed in the interview. Initially questions were very

general, however, as it progressed, questions become more specific and narrow to factors affecting classroom participation. In order to ease an interviewee, an author did not set time limit rather allow them to speak freely with an utmost confident and clarity.

Author also sought approval from the school administration to avoid misunderstanding in future. All of the interviews were conducted by the same facilitator to ensure consistency and continuity. Participants also signed a consent form at the beginning of each interview and interviewees had the opportunity to ask the facilitator questions. The consent forms included instructions for the interview, the objective of the study, and the responsibility of the participant including the benefits and risks. Furthermore, participants anonymity was protected by providing each interviewee with a pseudonym during the research process in order to protect their privacy and encourage freedom of speech without them being worried about the consequences of their honesty. The confidential form was asked to sign while sitting for interview.

The interviews were conducted over a five-week periods in the middle of the academic year in order to ensure that the subject they were enrolled in are well underway and the students will have the opportunity to participate in discussion base on course materials. Interviews were recorded using a smartphone for future transcription and analysis. Having an audio device does not create any inhibitions as there was no distracting lighting and the phone was turn over so that the interviewee could focus on the interview. The interviewer explains to all interviewees that the purpose of the audio recording is to ensure accuracy while collecting data.

The observation was another means to identify the factors which affect classroom participation. It was done on three biology classes for a period of 5 teaching weeks. The purpose of observation was to identify the forms and level of participation and subsequently to identify the students in terms of active or passive participation in classroom for focus group discussion. Their forms of participation were recorded throughout the teaching hours. Each observation was assisted by a Research Assistant (RA) who had record the behavior of the students.

This paper comprehensively discussed the findings from observation and interviews.

#### **5.4. Data analysis**

The data analyzed in this study were primarily from the interviews and observations conducted with the biology students. The observation data was analyze using excel database. The qualitative data of interview was conducted using the iterative process outlined by Creswell (2014) and was reviewed multiple times in order to ensure the information was properly understood for interpretation by the author. The process included the author listening to all of the interviews the same day in order to avoid subjectivity or misinterpretation of data. Within one month of the interviews being carried out, the author transcribed each interview word for word in order to further avoid subjectivity and ensure all responses were accurately interpreted. The author than verified the transcribed in interviews by listening to each interview again to ensure that everything was detailed as per the audio recording.

## 6. FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

The observation data collected during five teaching weeks by the research assistant has been tabulated in a week wise. The number of observations in each day has been compiled for a week and then taken the average. Therefore, the observation was in week wise. The interview data were directly presented for discussion.

### 6.1 Students Profile

Figure 1 showed the distribution of students in the three classrooms. These three classes were used as experimental classes throughout the study period of 5 teaching weeks.

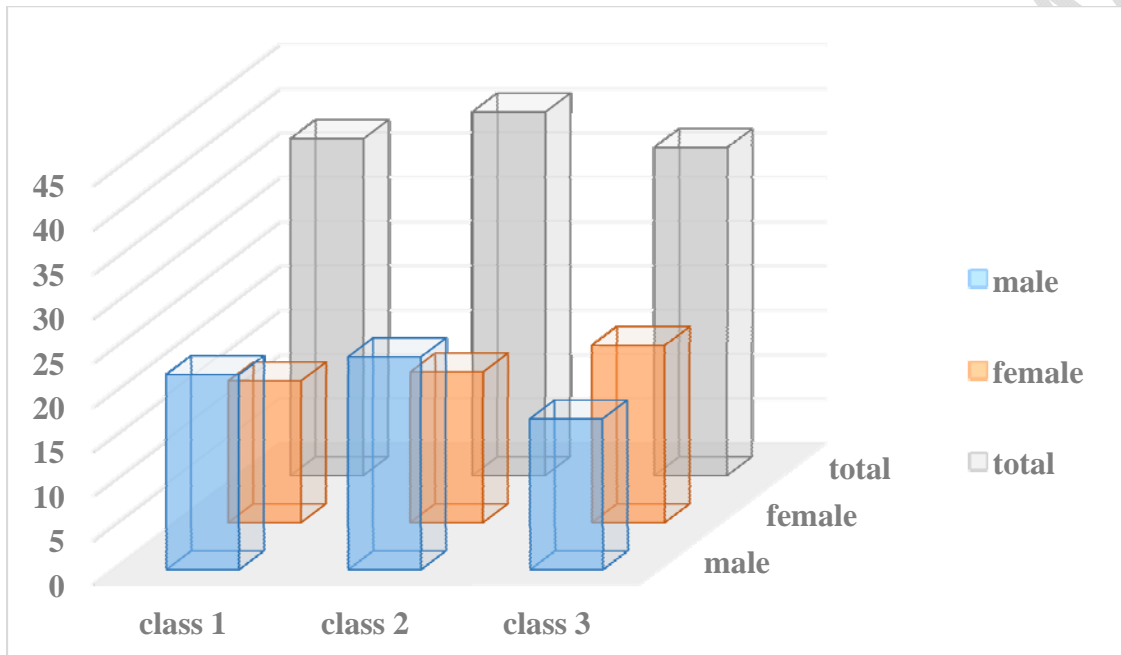


Figure 1. Number of students in three classes and Gender Students Participation

## 6.2 Students participation

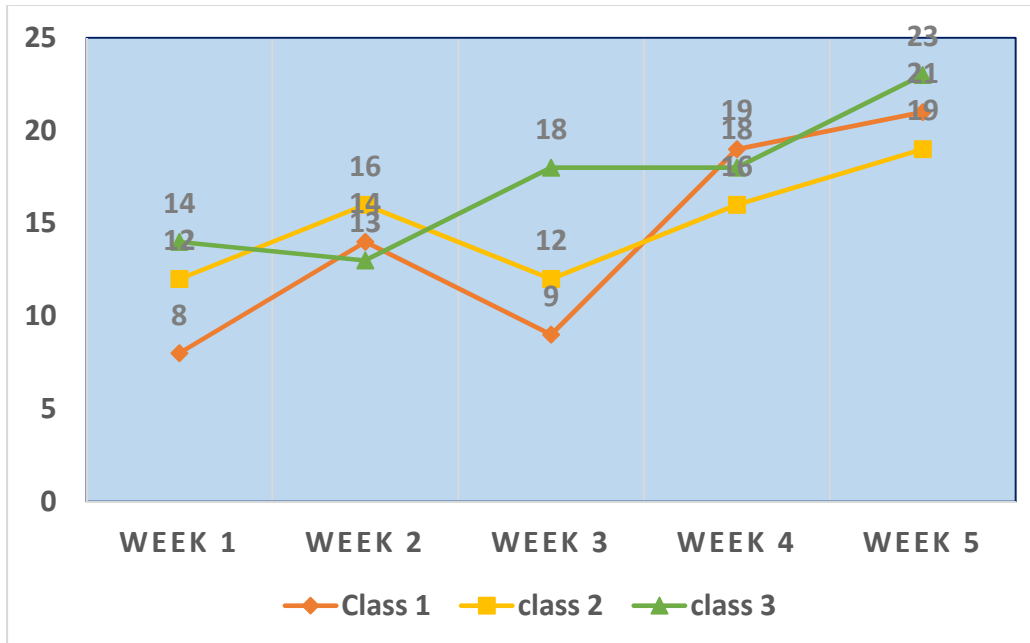


Figure 2. The frequency of active participation by classes

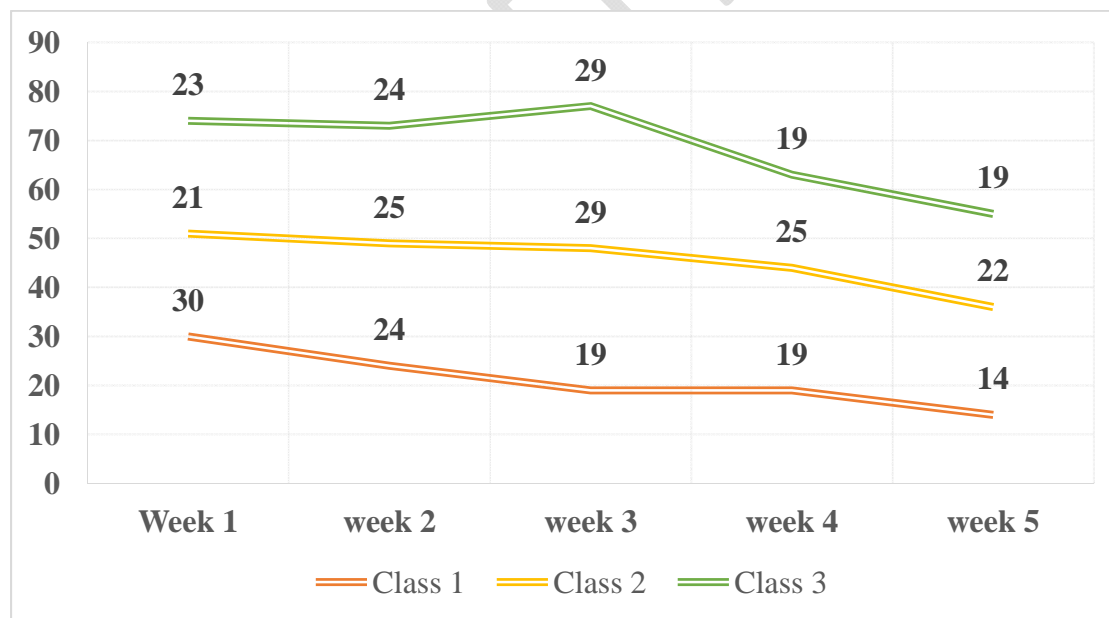


Figure 3. The frequency of passive participation by classes

Overall observation showed that majority of the students showed a passive participation. However, there were some students who were actively engaged in the class. For all the classes, the active participation was lower in first week of observation, with a progress increased in the following weeks. As for the class 1, the more active weeks were week 5, 4 and 2. Students of class 2 were more, actively engaged in week 5, 4 and 2. For class 3, active weeks were week 5, 4 and 3. Most of the students are involved in passive forms of participation in the classroom. However, for class 1, maximum passive observation was found in week 1. Observing classes 2 and 3, passive participation of the students was found to be maximum in week 3 in both the classes.

### 6.3 Forms of participation

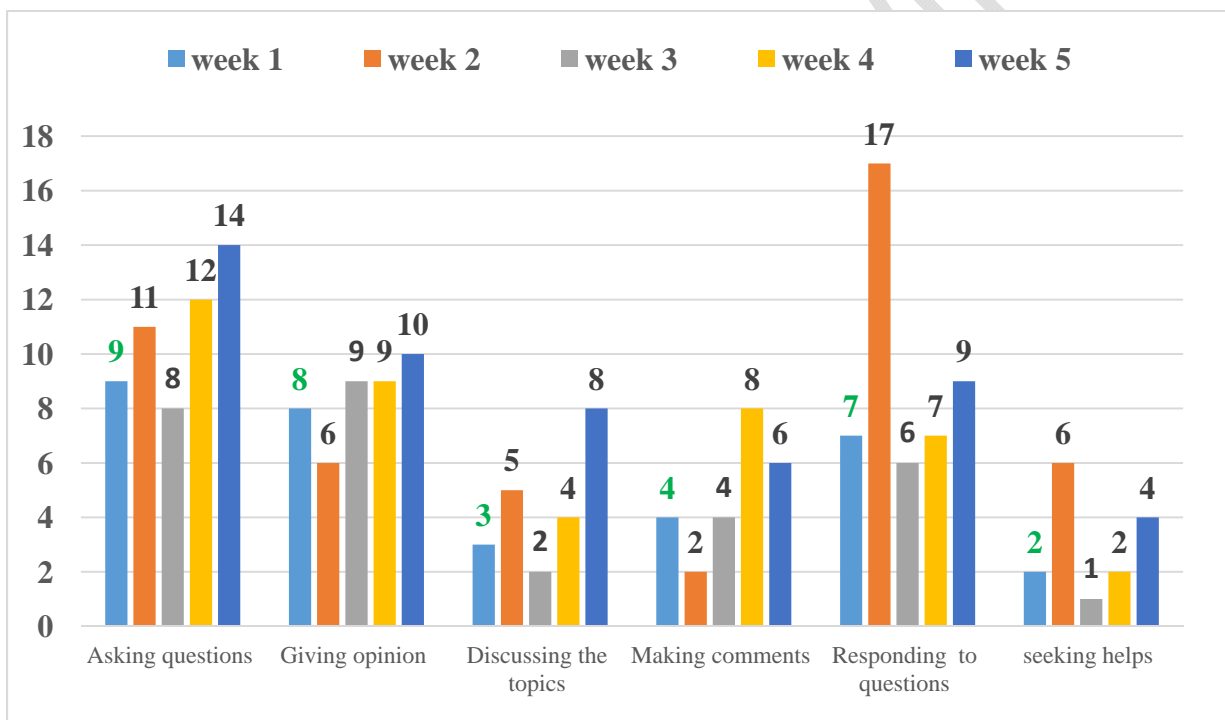
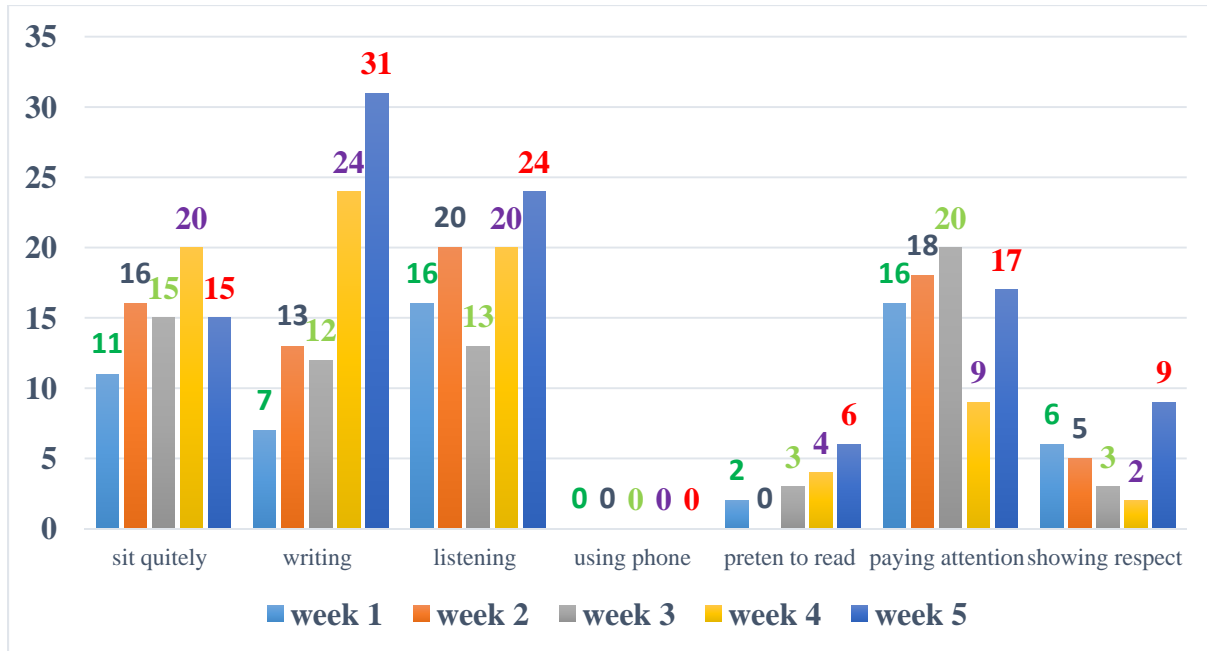


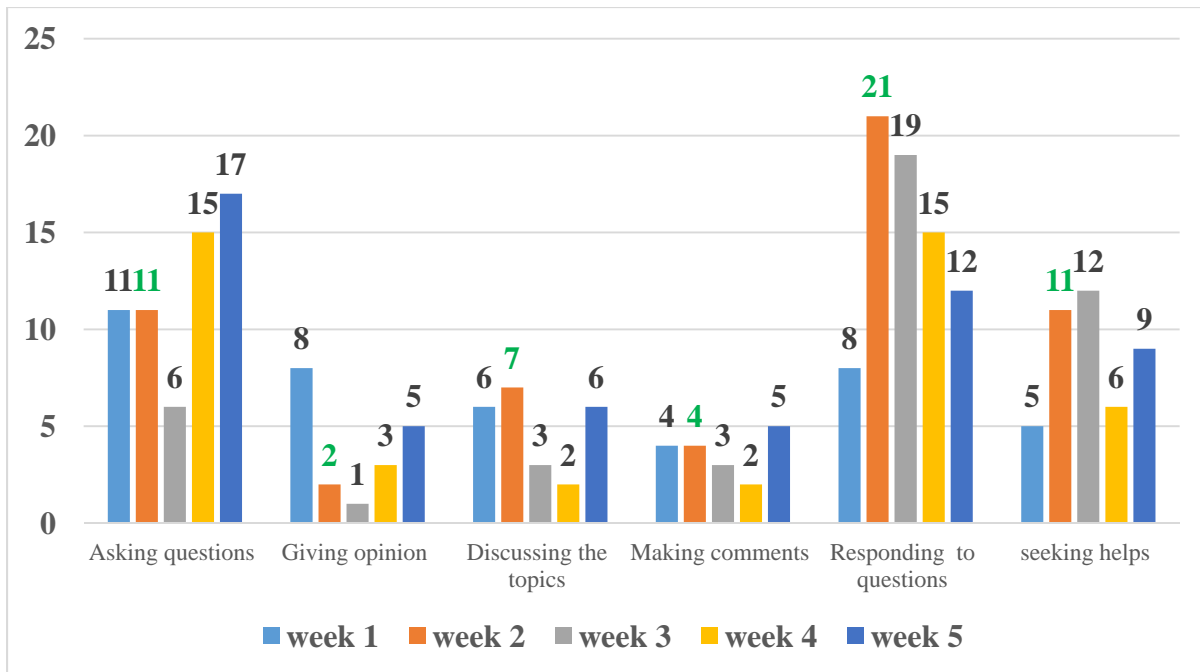
Figure. 4. Forms of Active Participation by class 1.



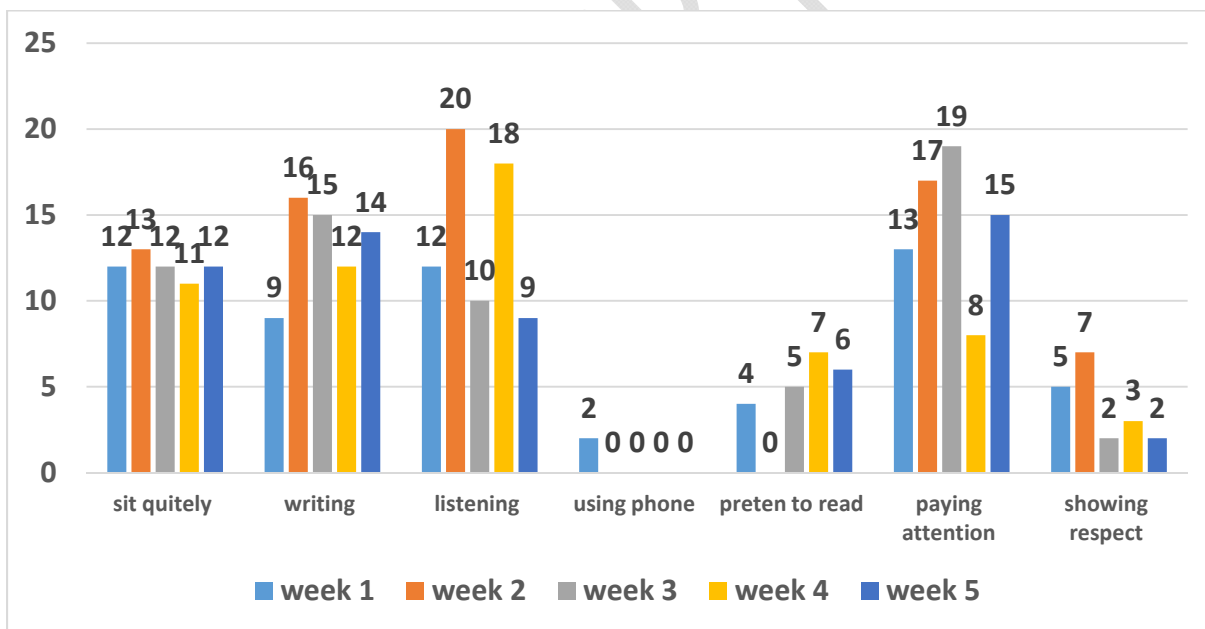


**Figure. 5. Forms of passive participation by class 1.**

Observation showed that class 1 were actively involved in asking questions, giving opinion, responding opinion, discussion, making comment and seeking help. Among all, students were confidently participated in asking and responding questions either being asked by friends or teacher concerned. In the passive forms of participation, maximum students were passively involved in the classroom as shown in the figure 5.

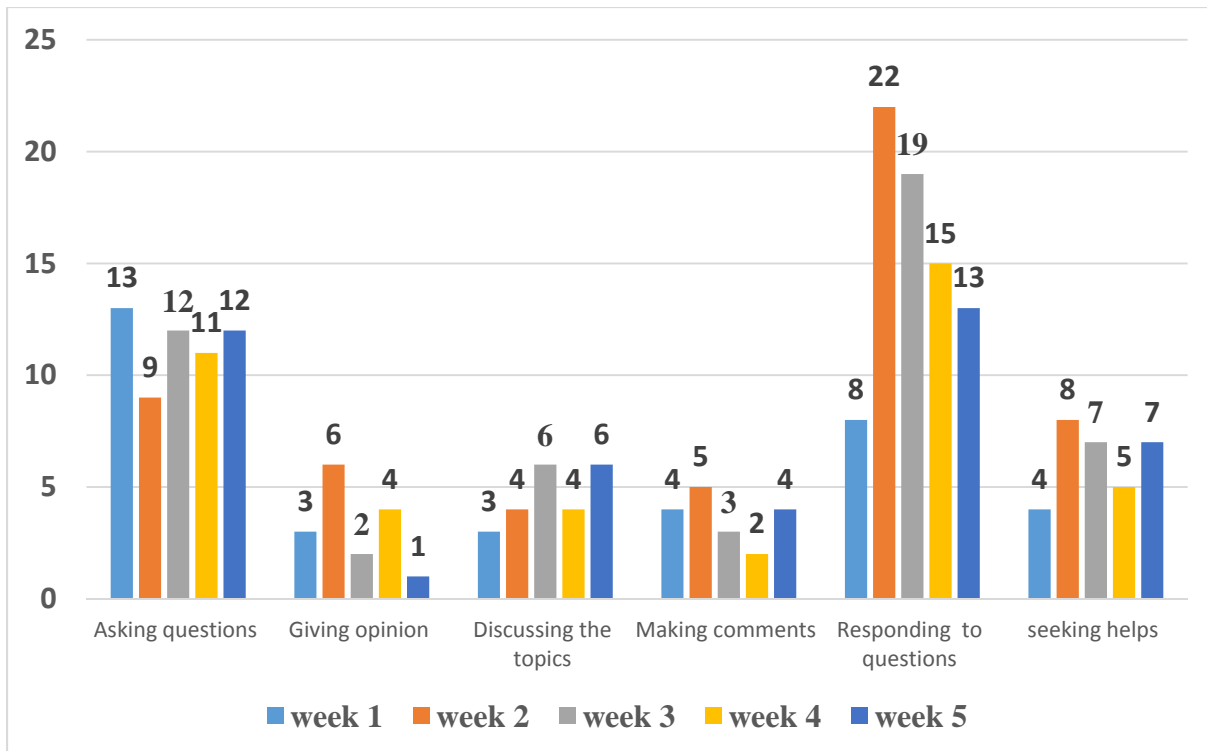


**Figure. 6. Forms of active participation by class 2.**

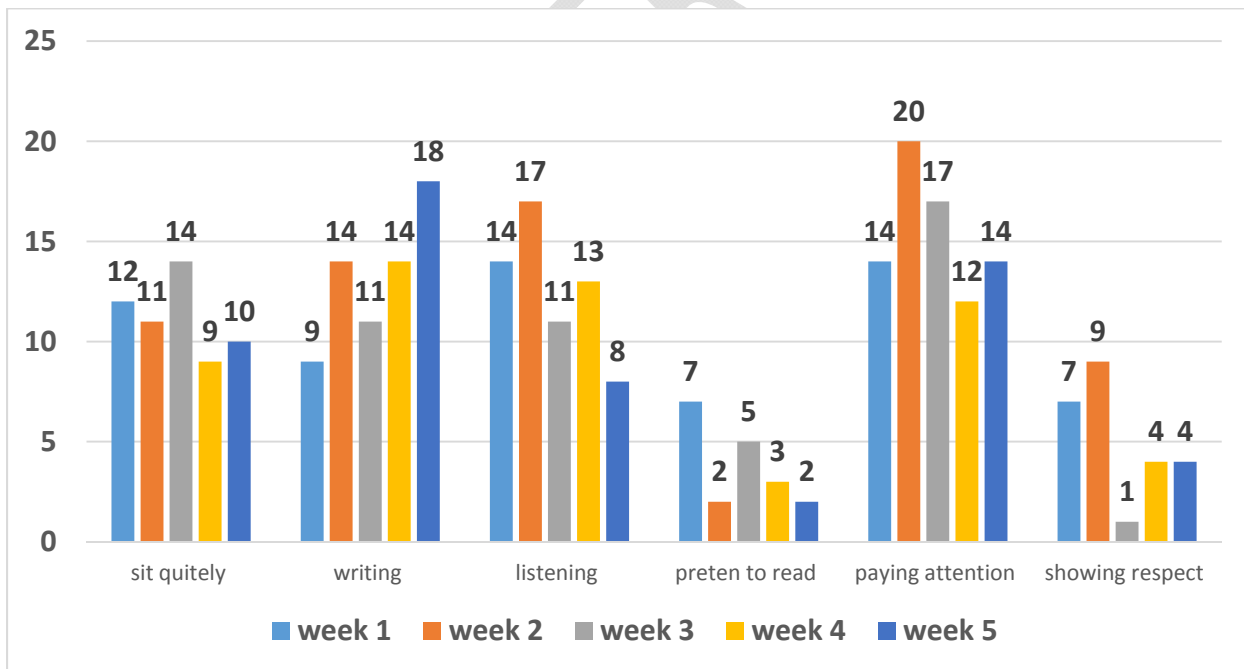


**Figure .7. Forms of passive participation by class 2.**

In class 2, throughout the observation students were actively involved in asking questions and responding questions being raised in the classroom. Interestingly, significant number of students were also sitting quietly, writing notes, listening and paying attention.



**Figure 8. Forms of active participation by class 3.**



**Figure 9. Forms of passive participation by class 3.**

In class 3, students were actively involved in responding questions from teacher and friends and also confidently raised questions to the floor based on the subject matter. In passive forms of participation, students were sitting quietly, writing notes, listening and paying attention.

Over all, in the Bhutanese school classroom students were actively participate in question answering and significant numbers of students were simply listening, write notes, pay attention and sit quietly. Concept of classroom participation seems to be understood by the students. It is very important in yielding positive outcome for students and developing their future abilities. Student #1 defined classroom participation as, "is the platform where the students can take part in classroom activity when teacher asked them the questions and provides chance for them to express their opinion". Students #2 & #9 said, "Giving instant response without hesitation or is the state of being an active in the class". Students #3 #4 #7 #6 #10 gave same opinion as it is a platform for student to keep actively engaged and build confident and improve speaking skills. However, there are many ways through which you can render your participation during teaching learning activities such as asking questions, responding questions and sharing opinion.

#### **6.4 Factors influencing classroom participation**

The interview data showed that the factors influencing classroom participation are teachers, friends, classroom size, advance preparation and language.

**Teacher:** the positive trait of teacher impacted classroom participation. All participants reported that supportive teacher welcome more active participation and do not mind when students make mistakes. Participants #1 and #2 reported that teacher should be frank and understanding so that the students feel comfortable enough to share their answers or thoughts since they do not need to fear being scolded for answering wrongly. This is clear in the following remarks which a student made, "I can participate more when my teacher remains friendly in the class and correct my mistakes without stating any negative remarks .....which indeed depress my self-esteem in the class!" (#1).

A teacher with sense of humor who cracks lots of jokes to relate with content knowledge can make learning fun and participating [25]. The four out of 10 (#4#9#10#3) participants noted if a teacher has a sense of humor while teaching then students feel comfortable to share their thought and opinion. "Teacher should be approachable, nice and frank in the classroom to provoke classroom participation or should able to draw curiosity among students so that students will participate in classroom by asking more questions" (#9).

Another factor was to impose more questions upon students to enhance classroom participation. "Yes, when teacher ask question then more number of students will actively participate in teaching learning process. However, the role of a teacher is to encourage and motivate students by making friendly environment." (#8, 4). Participants #5 has rightly stated "If the teacher is strict and precise, we feel hesitate to answer or participate".

Above all, teacher should be humorous, approachable, nice and frank in teaching learning process to welcome more classroom participation.

**Friend:** Friend is another factor which determine the classroom participation. If the friends in the classroom are supportive and familiar, the classroom participation would likely to increase. For example, if friends are supportive and encourage peers, then the number of participants will increase otherwise, they will passively give attendance in the class (#1). This was supported by two students: “friends are the best teacher who will entertain and taught in the best way” (#9) and “when my friends motivate me I feel more comfortable to participate in the class” (#4). Another student described “friend should accept others’ mistake instead of insulting or laughing at them” (#2). Instead of encouraging if their peers discourage by teasing when they make mistakes that would rather discourage their peer from classroom participation (#6). Participant #9 has raised the concern about the disparity between high and low performing students. When friend and teacher differentiate between high and low performing students, “I feel low and cannot give my best to class as a result, that will hamper my result at an end”.

**Classroom size:** Eight out of ten participants consented that classroom size affects the level of participation in Bhutanese classroom. In larger size classroom, there was not a sufficient amount of time to have the same opportunity to participate. Student #3 noted “too many students want to talk and there will not adequate time for everyone to say something”. Due to larger number of students wanting to participate and the length of time they consume while participating, there was an insufficient amount of time to participate. However, if the size of the class is small more number of students are likely to participate. Student #7 & #9 stated, “I feel more comfortable to share my thought and feelings when the classroom size is small”. In larger classroom size, students feel nervous and could not participate. # 5, 7.

**Advance class preparation:** Students who prepared in an advance for the class can participate extensively. Students noted that they felt more comfortable to express their opinion and thought if the content being taught were familiar. Student # 10 described, “I can raise my voice without any fear in my mind if I know the concept of what we are supposed to be studying”. Other two students further consolidated, “if we are unprepared then the fear of making mistakes while expressing concept may limit our participation in the class” #8 and “advance preparation gives confident to participate in the class” # 3.

**Language barriers:** All students expressed their opinion that they did not feel comfortable to express their thought in English. Student #5 noted, “I am worried on looking at the standard of my English. It is very difficult to phrase my thought in sentences”. Student #1 noted, “While speaking English I used to make lots of blunders so I am anxious to be criticized by my peers”. “It is all because of poor speaking language among Bhutanese students, handful of people who are good at language can repeatedly participate in the classroom”, #7 & 10.

## **6.5 Factors discouraging classroom participation**

The investigation into the factors discouraging classroom participation helps to provide an insight on how to keep them active. In general, there are three main factors; teachers, friends and classroom environment. The most influential factor is teacher. Student #4 stated, “If a teacher is good, motivating

and decent, we shall look open them as model. A bad teacher with the hostile attitude who doesn't teach well and always insulting student impedes learning. A teacher should be consistently progressing".

An immediate friend in the classroom affects participation of other students by the way some people behave in the class. Many of the students interviewed expressed their displeasure regarding having classmates who do not know when to keep quiet. For instance, student #8 elaborated, "I feel irritating when some students make unnecessary noise which disturbs my concentration". If the students are disturbing, teasing, dis-organized and incorporative, it would be difficult for other students to render their contribution in classroom discussion.

The physical setting of the classroom is another factor discouraging student's participation. It should be conducive to impress students to learn. Students reported, "if the size of the classroom is large then the students sitting at back cannot see the notes given on the board and information are always vague and when the information are not clear students could not give their best in classroom discussion. As a result, students sitting at back may fall in to sleep or some even exhibit distractive behaviors" # 9, #5 and #2. Student #3 elaborated, "I observed that students fall into sleep if the classroom size is small because of the congested sitting arrangement. In small size classroom, all tables and chairs are placed together...comparatively large number of students in a class is another factor of discouraging classroom participation". Above all, the physical layout is very influential in discouraging classroom participation.

## **6.6 Benefits of classroom participation**

Student reported that classroom participation entailed positive benefits in teaching-learning process. Participation helps students to clarify their doubts and makes their class time more interesting. Students #6 noted, "I feel happy when more students participate in asking questions, expressing opinion, answering teachers' questions and responding instruction. Such interactive sessions are very meaningful where we get lots of information". Student #4 reported, "I will understand better if I will participate in the class". Student #8 noted, "in fact, classroom participation is the first step to overcome nervousness and anxiety. We can able to inculcate confidence through repetitive classroom participation. Besides, we can also improve our speaking skills". The most important point noted by student#6 & 4, "Through participation, we will become critical thinker". Hearing wide varieties of perspectives from students, the classroom participation has innumerable benefits to students and also to the success of teacher.

## **7. DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study showed that significant number of students was not active participants in the classroom. The majority of students were found silently listening and taking notes. Nonetheless, there were comparatively less students involving in active class participation such as discussion, asking questions, responding, giving opinion and seeking help. This finding was supported by [30].

This study is very important for the teachers to identify the behavior of students in natural setting. Understanding the behavior of students helps them to create conducive environment to motivate students in classroom. According to [9], "conducive class environment encourages student participation, enthusiasm and willingness to learn and a participative environment in the classroom stimulates learning, sets the momentum and makes both the lecturer and student feel satisfied" as cited in [30].

The findings revealed that factors influencing classroom participation are teachers, friends, classroom size, advance preparation and language. The majority of students inclined to participate when the teachers are approachable [16] but the negative remarks of teachers also exhibited poor participation in class [8]. Majority of students mentioned if the teachers are frank, understanding and approachable then they feel comfortable to participate. [8] also indicated that students were more inclined to participate if the teacher was approachable. The supportive nature of teachers, would encourage students to participate without having to fear of scolding for the mistakes. Teacher should aim to ensure that the classroom environment is on that commands respect by all participants and in their dialogue with one another. In the teaching learning process, teacher should facilitate open discussion among peers and supports the importance of differing perspectives [26,16]. The feedback they provide students should be critical in ensuring they have understood the concept, retain the information by the lowest performer, therefore should be constructive and not seen as criticism which affect their confidence [26]. Another role of teacher is to encourage classroom participation by rewards with good words of acknowledgement. However, the strict and precise teacher would affect the willingness of the students to participate in the class.

Secondly, friends are another factor which influences classroom participation. Students also noted peers encourage their friends to participate and accept others mistakes instead of insulting or laughing at their mistakes as affirmed by [16, 30]. Students would more willing to engage if they didn't feel that teachers and friends would ridicule. Hence, a teacher should perceive classroom as supportive and respectful to encourage more group discussion [26].

The classroom size is very controversy finding of this study. The majority of students noted that classroom size affects classroom participation. In large classroom size, there is no sufficient time for all students to participate and students lose confident to share their opinions with the fear of making mistakes. However, [30] the size of classroom in the class does not so clearly affect their participation. For those who are extravert, environmental elements do not significantly affect their willingness to ask questions and giving opinions. For passive students, they do not like to be in big audiences and difficult to assimilate themselves with bigger crowd compared to active students. This clearly showed that classroom size is important to encourage passive students to be active in class. However, the current study found that both (passive and active) students in the class were affected by the classroom size. This finding was supported by [26] where the size of the classroom affects active classroom participation. Students would be more comfortable to share their opinion if the size of the classroom is small and they don't feel

nervous. Besides, in larger classroom students would not get adequate time and opportunity to share their opinion. Therefore, it is very important to keep small and efficient size of the classroom to encourage more participation. Consistent with the literature [26, 16] interview-based finding also found that the level of participation was affected by the classroom size.

Students who prepared for class by completing readings and reviewing material being discussed were more likely to participate in the class. They are more confident and assured of giving right opinion to teachers [26]. Similarly, in this study students expressed that they can participate more actively in the class if they are to be prepared in an advanced. Finally, language is another setback which hindered active participation in Bhutanese classroom. It was found that poor language has impacted in classroom participation [26]. Teacher would overcome this language barrier by offering language tutoring in order to build their confidence in group discussion via practice [26].

Finally, this study outlines the specific area that highlight the benefits and challenges associated with classroom participation among students in Bhutanese context. The study conducted gives detail information about the forms and views on classroom participation through students' perspective. By understanding the student perspective on participation, higher educational institutions are better able to structure their courses in a way that will increase participation levels and engage students in discussions thus contributing to their learning outcomes and development. Besides, this study remains basic reference for the teachers to enhance student's participation for better understanding of the concept taught in the class.

## **8. RESEARCH LIMITATION**

1. The first limitation of this study includes the sample being not sufficiently diverse. The diverse sample would have included multiple schools while sampling so that findings would have affect to bigger magnitude.
2. Author has collected only student's perspective and left teacher's perspective which would be further enriching to mine how participation unfolds within classroom.

The aforementioned limitations of the study rendered an opportunity for future researchers to explore factors affecting classroom participation in Bhutanese context.

## **9. CONCLUSION**

The findings of this study presented that as significant number of students was not active participants in the classroom, being silently listening and taking notes. Nonetheless, there were comparatively less students involving in active class participation such as discussion, asking questions, responding, giving opinion and seeking help. The factors influencing classroom participation are teachers, friends, classroom size, advance preparation and language. The physical setting of the classroom should be conducive to impress student to learn. And the teacher should be kind, decent, comical and approachable for students to get



motivated for study. The next step of this study will be to explore the reasons which may contribute towards the student tendency and willingness to participate in the classroom. Above all, this study gives an insight for teachers and students regarding the factors affecting students' participation among school students. This also assist teachers and learners to take into the accounts the way to overcome students' problems such as a fear of participation in the classroom and thus increase motivation.

## 10. ETHICAL APPROVAL

Authors have sought ethical approval from the Department of Research and External Relation (DRER), Royal University of Bhutan, Samtse college of Education and the school administration of Chhukha Central School.

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